DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 494 CS 506 809

AUTHOR Novak, Glenn D.
TITLE Selecting and Coping with College Interns in Radio.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Broadcast Industry; Communications; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; Journalism; *Journalism Education; On the Job Training; *Radio; Student Experience
IDENTIFIERS Broadcast Journalism

ABSTRACT

There are several areas within radio for a college intern. An internship in sales becomes highly useful in exposing the student to the financial end of the business since many college broadcasting programs emphasize production, journalism, and law. Although there are many students who enjoy working in production, many of the smaller stations do too little production to warrant an intern assigned specifically to this area, and many interns become engrossed with the fancy equipment. A college intern can be useful to a radio station's music director, although most music directors agree that a full-time intern slot would be difficult to fill in music alone. The motivated student can learn a lot more in the local radio news internship than in any college broadcast journalism course. Some of the problems which arise with college interns involve long-range career goals, attitude problems, and reliability. Unrealistic expectations on the part of both the intern and the broadcaster can also create problems. Some items to keep in mind when considering a college student for an internship include the following: treat the prospective intern as a regular candidate for employment; conduct a traditional interview; feel free to subject the student to some sort of practical test; and do not hesitate to reject applicants or fire one you have already hired. All parties involved--station manager, intern, and professor--must be willing to communicate their desires and fears in a legitimate effort to keep expectations high and yet realistic. (MG)

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SELECTING AND COPING WITH COLLEGE INTERNS IN RADIO

Glenn D. Novak
Assistant Professor of Mass Communication
West Georgia College
Carrollton, Georgia 30118

April, 1987

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"I'm looking for someone who's bright and energetic, with lots of initiative--a self-starter."

I figured I might have several good candidates for the man.

"He or she must be willing to go that extra mile, to put in all the time and effort it takes to get the job done right."

All the time and effort? My mental list of candidates narrowed.

"I don't want a clock-watcher, someone who just can't wait for five o'clock. This isn't a nine-to-five job. I'm here from five-thirty in the morning til after six almost every day. The person I need must accept that, and go with it."

Sixty hour work weeks? I might have one person. . .

"And, of course, we want someone who will work for no pay."

It was then I began to think I was running an employment agency and my client was God. But he wasn't. I was conducting a preliminary interview in my role as broadcast internship supervisor for my college. The man outlining his requests for an intern was the operations manager of a local radio station.

Values of a Radio Internship

The radio professional I had been talking to was looking for a college student to intern at his station. He had had several interns in the past and was sold on the idea that his station could benefit from continuing such an arrangement. In fact, when the right student is placed at the right station at the right time, everyone benefits. The student gains practical experience in sales, programming, promotions, production, news, and other areas, and makes some valuable contacts in the "real world" of radio that can lead to jobs later. The college benefits by establishing important relationships with local broadcasters who are usually willing to speak to classes on their areas of specialization. And, of course, the radio

station benefits by having an extra hand on board--usually young and energetic and willing to work--who can be learning skills while performing necessary tasks around the station at the same time. Usually the intern receives only academic credit for his work, so the station does not have to put him or her on the payroll, and the risks are minimal.

How successful any radio internship experience will be depends on several factors alluded to already. The college internship supervisor must carefully screen his applicants to try to get those students who are truly energetic and willing to work, and not just pretending to be. The radio station manager must be particular and discerning during the interview process to make reasonably sure this is the right student at the right time for his or her station. And all parties involved--station management, intern, and professor--must be willing to communicate their desires and fears in a legitimate effort to keep expectations high yet realistic. Even God cuts us a little slack.

Areas within Radio for an Intern

Probably the single most important opportunity for the radio intern is in sales. Unfortunately, it is also one of the least utilized. Diane Williams, sales manager for WLBB in Carrollton, Georgia, feels that she could put an intern to good use both in the actual selling end and in the copywriting. "I'd welcome any intern who is interested in learning broadcast sales. I'd want them to start off by going around with me and just observing. Later, after they understand the image that each of my clients is trying to create, the intern could try servicing some established accounts alone."

Because many college broadcasting programs lack specific courses in broadcast sales, choosing to emphasize production, journalism, and law instead, the sales

internship becomes highly useful in exposing the student to the financial end of the business. Williams emphasizes that radio is a public service mechanism but it is first and foremost a business. As a business it must make money to survive. "A student intern with some marketing classes or some sales experience, even for a newspaper or a store, would be a big benefit to me. There are lots of jobs to be done, from the menial things like typing and filing, to the more creative and challenging tasks like copywriting and selection of music and sound effects for the spots we cut. The work the intern can do frees me up to do other things related to sales and promotion."

Not all radio managers are as receptive to placing interns into sales. Chuck Williams, station manager for WPPI in Carrollton, Georgia, feels that sales is probably not the best place to start an intern coming into a radio station. "I'd say maybe--if the person really had a strong flair for sales. But the intern has to have some very strong writing skills in that area."

Good writing skills--or, more accurately, the lack of them--is a subject of concern to both broadcast educators and broadcast managers interested in putting interns to work at their stations. I once placed an intern at WKNG in Tallapoosa, Georgia, who wanted to learn local news reporting. She was impressed by the prospects of actually going on the air, and her voice and presentational style were fairly good. But the weekly phone calls from Jeff Koblitz, news director at the time, never failed to bemoan the student's writing ability. "She gets the stories all right, the facts are there, even some useful actualities. But the writing is terrible. The structure is confusing. It's grammatically awful. I have to rewrite everything she gives me, and often I just don't have the time." If we as educators need to focus on any single problem with the preparation of our interns, it is this whole issue of broadcast writing. Whether it's a sales pitch, a station promo, a news item, or a local PSA, the student is often thinking "term paper"

when he or she should be thinking, as the radio pro is, "clear, concise, and right-to-the-damn-point."

Interns who have a strong desire to work in radio but who may not have the strongest writing skills may be able to do quite well in the more technical areas of the station. These opportunities should not be overlooked, for they are certainly as important as sales to keeping the station on the air and getting the messages, both music and commercial, out onto the airwaves. These areas are production and engineering.

One thing needs to be kept in mind by all station personnel considering the employment of an intern. Most of our students don't know a sine wave from a smoke signal. They are coming from a program of academic courses usually taught within the framework of a so-called liberal arts education. Some will be coming to you from the Columbia School of Broadcasting, granted. A few may find your station from their campus at MIT. But these are in the minority and when they ask you where you keep your replacement demodulators for Westar I, hire them on the spot and place them in engineering. Jeff Glass, chief engineer at WNIU-FM in DeKalb, Illinois, was the epitome of restraint and patience as he worked with non-technically-inclined interns who never did seem to quite understand how a transmitter combined an audio wave onto a carrier wave and sent it out into space. If your engineers are more inclined to "do it themselves" for the sake of expediency, telling the intern that it's all done somehow with mirrors, you may wish to place that intern into a more productive setting--more productive for him and for your station's operation.

Production interns are a different matter. I personally can supply you with dozens of them. They can edit audiotape, cue one record while another one plays on the air, dub spots from open-reel to cart, ride gain on an interview, produce remote broadcasts, tape news for later use, as well as a host of other things.

There are only two problems here. One, many of the smaller stations do not do enough production to warrant an intern assigned there specifically for twenty hours or so each week. Two, many (not all) of these interns become so engrossed with the fancy equipment found in both their college audio labs and their radio station production rooms that they develop a sort of tunnel vision. Their eyes begin to look like two VU meters. I fear that we as broadcast educators sometimes put too much emphasis on the development of production skills, at the expense of sales, promotion, news, and programming. Several interns that I have placed at local radio stations became obsessed with what the lovely studio equipment could do, and developed a parochial view of radio that left no room for the reason why that equipment did what it did. Bobby Dumas, music director at WPPI, Carrollton, runs through his air shift effortlessly, talking to his listening audience and to me almost at the same time: "The equipment is not hard to learn. I can teach anyone how to work this equipment in a few hours, especially if they've worked at all at a college radio station." Dumas is not impressed with the technical wizard. "The good intern working in music or programming should have the right attitude, lots of enthusiasm, the so-called 'radio personality.' This job is more than pushing buttons."

A college intern can be useful to a radio station's music director, although most music directors I talked to agreed that a full-time intern slot would be difficult to fill in music alone. Pat Shumake, music director at WLBB, feels he could work with an intern a few hours a week, "compiling playlists, studying the trades, and explaining the process of music selection and rotation." But it would be hard to fully utilize the intern solely in the area of music or programming. "He or she would rotate about the station from one area to another."

Another consideration relative to placing a college student into a music-oriented internship is the kind of music that the station plays. I've had interns

complain that they hate country music and can't relate to the audience or the station management. "I'd really rather be interning at a hard rock station, or something sorta top-40, know what I mean?" asked one girl. I knew what she meant, all right. So did the program director of the country station she was working at. As the quarter progressed and the intern began to understand that neither she nor I nor her boss was going to change the station format, and that station format was really pretty incidental to the kinds of learning that we were all expecting from her, she settled in nicely and did a rather good job. At the end of ten weeks, she even told me, in a private office far from her friends, that "some of those country songs were not too bad."

The radio news internship presents us all with some of the richest opportunities and some of the knottiest problems imaginable. The intern who can write pretty well, follow directions, and get the facts straight will usually find the station is using his news stories in part or in full within a couple of weeks. Some stations will permit, even encourage, the intern to do some of the newscasts live on the air; others will rely on the intern to cover city council meetings or traffic accidents and bring back usable tape to incorporate into the newscast done by the pro. In any case, the opportunities for immediate satisfaction are there. The intern can soon feel part of the team, and realizes his contributions are useful to the station and to his boss. One early success can breed future successes.

But the news internship also has its problems and pitfalls. Matt Cook, news director for WLBB, explains that it can be difficult for an intern to get information from local police. "They know me because I'm in there every single morning. They trust me and usually give me all the information I'm after. If I send an intern in there alone, they usually clam up." The solution to that problem is for the news director to go with the intern as he makes his assigned rounds. But how efficient is that? How is the intern helping the station? "At first I have

to spend a lot of time with the intern, and I do. It's a teaching situation. Many times I'll send the student out to get a story on, say, a drug bust. He'll come back in 3½ hours with a pretty good story. I'll work with him on it, touch it up, explain what's wrong. It turns out to be something I could have gotten myself in ten minutes on the phone using the right contact. But the intern can't learn if I do it all for him."

Cook's competitor at WPPI is Collins Knighton. As news director there, Knighton stresses other problems unrelated to inefficiency. He is critical of the "egghead" mentality he has seen in so many broadcast journalism students. "In an intern I want a guy or gal who is down-to-earth, someone with personality. I want a fun-type person I can get along with while we work together for ten weeks. I had an intern who used big words on the air, words like 'plethora' and 'adamant.' My listeners didn't know those words. Hell, I didn't know those words."

Interns in news--good interns--are in demand. Not every student interested in radio wants to spend ten or fifteen weeks covering small town news events. Those who are, however, can find some excellent practitioners and wonderful teachers out there. The motivated student can learn a lot more in the local radio news internship than in any college broadcast journalism course that I've taken, taught, or heard of.

To Specialize or to Generalize

Most interns have but a 10-week quarter or a 15-week semester to devote to the radio station that has accepted them. Obviously, no one can be expected to learn everything there is about every aspect of the station in that short space of time. One student, who bounced around from one department to another on a weekly basis at WKDI in DeKalb, Illinois, felt he had gotten his feet wet enough

to know what he did and did not like about radio (certainly a valuable lesson), but that he never did one thing long enough to develop any skill or understanding of it. Sandra Enterline, station manager at the time, held the philosophy that in one term no student can develop any meaningful expertise. The student should be exposed to the overall functioning of the station to see how all the apparently disparate elements come together to make a whole. If the student can return for subsequent work, with or without credit, the concentration on specifics can begin to occur.

WLBB's Cook disagrees with the generalist approach to a radio internship, especially in news. "The student has developed a good base after ten weeks of doing local news. He or she has developed some rapport with the local authorities. He has contacts. He can write a news story. But that's only the start." An intern who can commit to a second term with the station should do so in order to continue developing a "nose for news." Cook adds: "During the second stint we work more on actuality selection, law and ethics, and the whole matter of presenting news on the air. I favor specialization if the student wants a career in news. If they're not sure, then maybe a couple of weeks each in sales, promotion, programming, and production."

Typical Internship Problems

Certain problems crop up with the radio intern that seem independent of the job into which he or she is placed. These problems are perhaps more a function of personalities, attitudes, or preparation than of station size, format, or location. In any case, the problems are very real. They can and do affect the student, the broadcaster, and the college.

One problem is the result of long-range career goals. Some students want

to work in radio after they graduate; others have their sights set on broadcast or cable television. Obviously, as station managers looking for the most motivated interns to work at your stations, you want the former. I once had the unfortunate experience of letting a college senior beguile me into thinking radio was his main interest. Accordingly, I placed him at a local radio station working directly under the general manager. After about three weeks his interest and enthusiasm seemed to wane, and he confided in me that he really wanted to become a TV sportscaster. The GM and I had a discussion, and we yanked him after three innings. The moral of that story is simple: all of us involved in the interviewing/screening process need to intensify our efforts in candidate selection. Look at the student's record of broadcast-related co-curricular activities and see how radio figures in. Have several station personnel interview the prospective intern, and share reactions. Make sure the student has a genuine commitment to radio. Nobody needs a half-interested, lackadaisical student who only wants the credit hours and the words "broadcast internship" printed on a college transcript.

Another problem, also related to attitude, is the student who comes into the station thinking he or she is God's gift to radio. The student may have worked a summer at his hometown station doing the Sunday-morning gospel hour. He may be a DJ at the campus radio station. He can do a few useful things for your station. He can also get on everybody's nerves. WPPI's Knighton does not want "a donut-hole personality." But, he is quick to add, "I also don't want an intern who suffers from the 'Rock DJ syndrome.' You know the type. 'Hey man, I'm cool, I know rock 'n' roll, I've been a jock let's play more of this group or that group.'" Most radio pros agree that that attitude won't take the intern very far.

Reliability can be a serious problem. For some students the internship in

radio, whether paid or not, represents their first real full-time job. Many of them have developed an attitude, supported by some professors, that they can attend class if and when they choose, that no one is taking attendance and that the classes will go on without them. Besides, if they cut class, they can get the notes from a friend. On the job, this attitude is disastrous. There aren't any notes to get, and in many cases the station cannot go on all right without them. One student was late for work twice. The station tried to understand, and forgave. A week later, the student was supposed to sign the station on at 6:30 in the morning. It was the Sunday of the time change. He arrived at 8:00. It seems that, rather than set his clock ahead one hour, he had set it ahead eleven hours! The station signed on an hour and a half late, and neither advertisers nor station management was happy. The station and student arranged an amiable parting of the ways.

Unrealistic Expectations

Unrealistic expectations on the part of both the intern and the broadcaster can create problems. The sales manager at the medium market station has a right to expect that his intern, on the streets all day with him or another salesman, will not show up in blue jeans and a sweatshirt. But the student may not own a $300 suit, either. His car may be old and break down occasionally, if he even has one. I recently had one intern who had to do a local internship, although she really wanted Atlanta, because she had no car. Every day for ten weeks she took a taxi from her dorm to her job and back again. Student finances need to be kept in mind.

Time constraints are yet another area where the broadcaster may have some unrealistic expectations. He may want the student to be at his station as long

as he is--sometimes 8, 10, or 12 hours a day. For some students such a time commitment may be possible. For others, who might commute from their small college town an hour or so to a larger city, those hours can be too long. Some interns are taking other classes at the college during the same term they work at the station. Devoting too many hours to the internship can spell trouble with the tests and papers required by professors in other courses. One intern I had working at an Atlanta station did exceptionally well there. He knocked himself out for his boss. The more work he got done, the more they gave him. He practically lived there, and the station management was impressed. Unfortunately, his professors back at school were not. He barely passed Spanish with a D and failed a required math course. Those courses seemed remote and unrelated to his broadcast internship, and he'd let them slide. The student was placed on academic probation and later chose to drop out of school. That same station hired him on with the understanding that he'd eventually need the degree to get into management. Not really a sad story, but one with a lesson. First, determine how many hours per day or week your station would <u>like</u> or would <u>need</u> (not the same thing) the intern. If it is more than 25 hours a week, I would strongly recommend you select a student who is not taking other courses at his college, especially if a commute is involved. That student learns more and learns it faster, and does not have the burden of trying to shift mental gears from radio to geometry all week. Even at the risk of delaying graduation by one or two quarters, even a year or more, the student should be encouraged to do the internship as a full-time work commitment. Walt Cullars is currently station manager at WWGC-FM, the campus radio station at West Georgia College. He has kicked around in radio for several years in music, news, programming. At 26, he still has not finished his degree, but is not worried. "What's the hurry? I'd rather get the practical experiences in radio along the way. I've worked in radio a lot and understand

how it operates. The degree is a lot more valuable when it's combined with the experience factor."

The other side of the coin is represented by some unrealistic expectations on the part of the student. Many students, avid consumers of radio, tend to look at it from a performance angle. They'll be happy to write commercials, gather news, produce spots. But they really want to get on the air. They want to read news, do the giveaways, conduct a talk show. For many of them, these expectations are unrealistic. Some don't have the voice. Some don't have the personality. Others get nervous, or tongue-tied, or can't ad-lib. The student needs to know his or her limitations. He should try to improve his weaknesses, with the constructive criticism of his supervisors, but he should not expect to carry the announcing load of the station, no matter how good he is.

Some students expect to get paid during their internships. Some stations do allow a minimum wage for their interns, who also receive five or ten hours of academic credit. Many stations do not. During preliminary interviews between student and faculty member, and between student and broadcast supervisor, the whole issue of pay should be settled. Nothing should be left uncertain, including reimbursement for meals or mileage. I tend to stress the value of the learning and the experiences to be derived from working three to eight hours a day at a professional radio station. Chances are that if the student insists on a wage, he's not interested in an internship. He's interested in a job.

How to Get a Good Intern

When considering a college student as an intern at your radio station this summer, keep the following items in mind:

1. Grades. They're important, but they don't mean everything. I'm reminded of a bright female student on the Dean's List. She read a lot. She could memorize

material and always did well on tests. Her internship experience was miserable. She didn't get along with her supervisor, who stressed practice over theory. She would rather read than work. She lacked initiative, expecting her supervisor to lay out every assignment in detail, and guide her through it like her professors had done. The supervisor just did not have the time.

Another case in point is the student with the C average. The department insisted on a B for a credit internship, but this student was special. She was bright and a very quick study, just not Harvard Law School material. She had tons of desire and a great personality. She passed all her courses and could follow directions extremely well. She was as reliable as they come. Although we could not give her academic credit for her work, we did place her with an Atlanta station over the summer. I got nothing but glowing reports from both the intern and the station.

2. References. Treat the prospective intern as a regular candidate for employment at your station. Study the resumé. Read all the letters of reference. Talk to the professors who know the student pretty well and find out their opinions on how this student might work out. Many can only speak of academic performance, and the transcript can tell you that. But others may serve as advisors to student chapters of Alpha Epsilon Rho, Sigma Delta Chi, Georgia Association of Newscasters, and the like. They're in a position to be frank about the student's real interest in radio as evidenced by extra-curricular involvement. Ask for an honest appraisal.

3. Interview. Conduct a traditional interview with the prospective intern. Provide a tour of the station. Let others interview the student who might be working with him or her. Explain the market, the format, and th station personnel structure. Find out what area of radio the student is most interested in. It may not be your area of need, or you may deem your staff person in that area a great practitioner but a poor teacher. Determine if the student plans to devote all his time

and energy to the internship, or if he will be taking other classes at the same time. Don't get stuck with an intern who is stretched too thin.

4. Practical tests. As an educator, I use a short practical test as a sort of "exit exam." It shows me that the student has done more than read the book and turn in the assignments. He or she must exit the course by writing radio spots and news that are up to specs, and by editing audiotape with undetectable splices or producing commercials of exact time limits, perfect levels, and audience appeal. As the employer of a new intern you should feel free to subject the student to the same kind of test--perhaps an "entrance exam." It should test the student's practical skills within the area of assignment. Let him demonstrate to you that he can work an audio board if that's important. Make her write up a newscast based on some facts you give. Sit the student down in front of a microphone and console and produce an on-the-spot air check tape. We are teaching these skills to our students, and you have a right to measure the extent to which they have learned them.

5. Reject applicants. Don't be too kind. If the student does not meet your minimum standards, and you feel he would need an inordinate amount of training to be of any real use to your operation, reject him. As educators, we feel that the internship should indeed be a learning experience. We also realize that the intern cannot come in and disrupt your normal operations by requiring constant attention and highly individualized instruction. You have a job to do and a product to deliver. So do we. Maybe we as educators are not always doing it as well as we might.

Mike Lazar, station manager at WNIU-FM in DeKalb, Illinois, once told me that it was better to chastise an intern than to fire an employee. If you've taken on an intern and he is not working out, discuss the problem with him and give him a chance to correct his deficiencies, especially if they are related more to attitude than to technical skill. Contact the faculty internship coordinator if no solution seems imminent. It is better for the student to learn early that he is

not cut out for broadcasting than to finish a four or five year college program thinking (or hoping) that he's got what it takes. Yes, you can fire interns. It is not common, but it can happen. Call the college to explain what is happening and send the student back to the drawing boards. He or she will get an "F" if it is too late to officially drop the course, and will receive no academic credit. If it's early enough in the term, the student can get a "W" (for withdrawal) on the transcript and may have time to add a course or two in place of the internship. Remember that at most colleges and universities an internship is not a requirement for a degree in broadcasting or mass communication. It is a privilege, not a right. It is an elective reserved for the better students who presumably have the motivation and initiative to learn in a fast-paced, competitive, professional environment. You have not only the right but the obligation to drop interns who do not even attempt to measure up to your (or our) standards.

Setting Sail

There are a lot of college students out there now, all around the country. More of them are majoring in mass communication or broadcasting today than ever before. The majority know that they will be entering a very competitive business, with some initially low salaries, and some very small market environments. Yet they persist in their studies, feeling that somehow the work is important, or glamorous, or a stepping-stone to "real show biz." These students realize the value of a successful broadcasting internship. It can teach them skills not learned in the classroom. It can test their interests and aptitudes. It can make a resumé more attractive. It can even open some doors by providing an opportunity to do some "networking" within their field.

Unless your station is located 500 miles from nowhere in a primarily unin-

habited region of our land, you and your station colleagues should have little difficulty starting up an internship program. Your station does not have to be in a college town. College students live everywhere. Most prefer to do an internship during the summer when they are living at home anyway. Let several of the closest colleges or universities know you are interested in a college student to work in radio. The school will probably put you in touch with a faculty member in mass communication who serves as the internship coordinator, and who can take all the information down relative to your needs and your opportunities. He or she will announce your opening in classes, post notices, recruit students personally, contact the placement center, and generally "talk it up" to try his best to get an appropriate intern for your station. He or she operates in the combined role of educator, psychologist, prophet, and marriage counselor, trying to get the right student into the right station at the right time. When that happens, it's truly a rewarding experience for everyone involved in the process.

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